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PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND MINORITIES

Written statement*/ submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 June 2001]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received in English, from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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We would like to draw your attention to the human rights situation on an Asian region where several indigenous peoples are claiming for a long time to restore their fundamental rights because their territories had been splitted up by forming the states of India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Before going into details referring to the case of the "Zo" people, we first would like to highly welcome the fact, that the cease-fire between India and the Nagas could be extended. Considering the problems which faced the negotiations, we feel this extension will substantially contribute to find a political solution for the area.

The case of the people who identify themselves as Zo is not principally different from what we know about colonial ruling by Britain in the Asian context. They suffered the colonial expeditions to invade the Northeastern region of South Asia. The so called Chin-Lushai Conference in 1892 did mention the Zo people and a resolution had been seeking to re-instate Zo people under one administration unit. The colonial power recognised the distinctive nationality of Zo people and adopted a special legislation for governing the Zo's country as a different area.

The latest of these regulations, the Government of India Act in 1935, acknowledged that Zo people would be free and independent with the right to decide their future political destiny. All political parties formed by Zo people in the post World War II called for reunification of the Zo country under the umbrella of one administrative unit. We know that history did not coincide with this project.

So, the case of the Zo people was redefined and enunciated in the so called Champhai Declaration adopted in May 1988 during a convention held by the Zo Reunification Organisation, a political forum for the Zo inhabited areas. As the name indicates, the Zo Reunification Organisation (ZORO) is committed with a peaceful process of reunification of the Zo areas according to the above mentioned Chin-Lushai Conference. ZORO also pleads for food shelter, help in appropriate education and health service for its people.

Respected Members of the Sub-Commission, we are aware that the Northeastern area of South Asia is a highly sensitive region; still not very well known at the international agenda. Considering the circumstances, we feel that a report on the human rights situation on minorities like the Zo would be very helpful to further discussion on how the administrative unit of the Zo might be reached. Additionally, an international conference dealing with the entire region also would encourage a peaceful process towards peoples' self determination.